

New funding sources sought for Foundation

President asks businesses to donate

By Mike Fimea
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Mark Rubin thinks the Arizona Bar Foundation should look beyond the law office for financial support.

"We hear from a lot of people who don't believe the government should provide legal services," said Rubin, who began his one-year term as foundation president in January. "I want to challenge them to see what they can provide. The business community could deliver funds and help with real needs. The people who use legal services are good people who are just down on their luck."

The Bar Foundation funds legal aid for the poor and educational programs at schools. Its budget comes from lawyer contributions, grants and interest from lawyers' trust accounts. For 2002, the foundation awarded nearly \$950,000 to 11 agencies (see sidebar). Rubin, a sole practitioner in Tucson, says the foundation has "quietly done a fabulous job" at legal services and civics instruction. Where it's fallen short is in getting its message across.

"We haven't been as good at communicating our story," he said.

"We provide services to students all over the state, and Bosnia has sent delegations to Arizona to learn how our justice system works. You can't have a democracy without also having a place to resolve disputes."

As he begins his term, Rubin faces an altered funding landscape for the state's three primary legal-aid agencies: Community Legal Services in Phoenix, Southern Arizona Legal Aid in Tucson and DNA-People's Legal Services in Flagstaff. The Arizona Equal Justice Campaign has secured a three-year, \$1.4 million commitment through a campaign that asks Arizona Bar members to contribute the equivalent of two billable hours annually.

"We're friendly competitors. I've made my two-hour pledge," Rubin said. The difference is that besides the "big three," the foundation also gives money to smaller agencies like Catholic Social Services and the Southern Arizona People's Law Center. "We also fund a program at the ASU law school where students help the homeless get reacquainted with the legal aspects of society," Rubin said. "The students show them how to get a driver's license or deal with income taxes, things that we take for granted." Rubin has held nearly every position within the foundation - treasurer, secretary, president-elect - since joining its board of directors in 1996. He has watched as the trust

account fund has swelled and contracted, depending on the pricing whims of the state's banks.

In 2000, for example, the foundation awarded \$788,000 in grants - a drop of nearly \$200,000 - because banks reduced the interest rates paid on lawyers' trust accounts. Funding has returned to the pre-2000 level, for which Rubin credits former foundation President David Gaona.

"David did a tremendous job," Rubin said. "He'd meet with the banks and after his meetings, the rates would go up."

Rubin doesn't expect interest rates on the trust accounts to suddenly increase - "the highest rates today are less than they were 10 years ago; that's the economy" - but he said the foundation must continue to advocate its cause.

"The funds we get from banks reflect a decision to part with money that they could use for other purposes," he said. "We have to make the case that our mission is important to them."

Besides his legal career, Rubin is the founder of an online bookstore (lawyerbriefs.com) that reviews law-based novels. The site lists about 600 titles from the past 20 years, with reviews of about one-third of the books.

John Lescroart and William Lashner are among Rubin's favorite writers; he is less enamored of John Grisham.

"My purpose is to see if these authors stay reasonably true to the law and don't get too fanciful," he said. "It's a hobby that doesn't get too much time these days."

When he looks back a year from now, Rubin said he hopes the foundation has new programs, a higher profile and a rejuvenated board.

"I want to leave knowing I started us on the road to bigger and better things," he said.

Distribution of funds

The following legal-aid agencies have received funding for 2002 from the Arizona Bar Foundation. The foundation distributed the same total amount (\$948,500) as it did during 2001. Money is used to provide legal assistance to individuals and families whose incomes are at or near the poverty line. Typical cases involve housing issues, consumer problems, custody and divorce cases, and problems with Social Security and other government programs.

Southern Arizona Legal Aid, Tucson: \$309,000. Serves nine counties (Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Navajo, Pima, Pinal and Santa Cruz) plus several Indian reservations.

	<p>Community Legal Services, Phoenix: \$155,000. Active in five counties (La Paz, Maricopa, Mohave, Yavapai and Yuma).</p> <p>Florence Immigration and Refugee Rights Project: \$110,000. Assists clients at prisons in Florence and Eloy.</p> <p>DNA-People's Legal Services, Window Rock: \$107,500. Covers Coconino County, the Navajo Reservation and four other reservations in northern Arizona</p> <p>William E. Morris Institute for Justice, Phoenix: \$105,000. Helps clients statewide.</p> <p>Advocates for the Disabled, Phoenix: \$41,000. Works with clients statewide.</p> <p>Catholic Social Services: \$37,000 each to offices in Phoenix and Tucson. Phoenix office works statewide; Tucson office covers southern and western Arizona.</p> <p>Arizona Capital Representation Project, Tempe: \$30,000. Serves clients statewide.</p> <p>Southern Arizona People's Law Center, Tucson: \$15,000. Works with clients in Pima County.</p> <p>ASU College of Law, Tempe: \$2,000. Assists clients at homeless shelters in Maricopa County.</p>	
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